

# ROGER ERICKSON'S DEPARTURE FROM THE WCCO GOOD MORNING SHOW

HON. BRUCE F. VENTO

OF MINNESOTA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 24, 1996

Mr. VENTO. Mr. Speaker, today I want to pay tribute to Roger Erickson, one of Minnesota's special radio personalities, as he steps down from hosting WCCO Radio's Good Morning Show. Although Roger Erickson is not retiring, as of February 1, 1996, after 35 years on the WCCO Station Good Morning Show, he will hand over control of the program to his new on-air partner, Dave Lee.

Just a few years ago, Charlie Boone, a long-time cohost, stepped out of this special Good Morning program and, in a way, Erickson's departure marks the end of an era. I have no doubt, based on the good talent of Dave Lee and the format, Good Morning will remain a Minnesota early morning tradition. But the warm surround sound of Roger Erickson's dulcet tone crooning "Good Morning" or school announcements will be missed.

Over the past three and a half decades, Roger Erickson has become a preeminent voice in Minnesota morning radio. Roger has relayed the news with insight and compassion and entertained us with stories and humorous sketches. His school closing announcements have become a Minnesota institution: Generations of children have listened breathlessly to Roger on cold winter mornings hoping to hear their school called. Roger's warmth, spontaneity, and imagination have earned him thousands of loyal listeners. Some conjecture has it that in his youth he was a character in a Charlie Brown comic strip.

Roger Erickson's radio shows have been popular not only because he is a gifted broadcaster, but because he truly understands Minnesota and the culture of subtle Scandinavian humor. Roger was raised on a farm in Winthrop and studied speech and theater at the University of Minnesota. He was determined to work for WCCO Radio and, in 1959, took a job as Bozo the Clown on WCCO-TV in Minneapolis to get his foot in the door at the station. Within 2 months he was offered a WCCO Radio job, and he has continued there ever since, entralling local audiences with spoofs like "Minnesota Hospital," "Charlie's Cafe Mediocore," "Air Lutefiska," and, most recently, fishing stories from two characters, Gill and Finn.

WCCO Radio prides itself on its Good Neighbor approach to broadcasting and Roger Erickson exemplifies the very best of the Good Neighbor tradition. Although we will miss hearing Roger's voice every day on the Good Morning Show, we are pleased he is continuing his work at WCCO in other capacities and wish him the very best in all his endeavors.

[From the Minneapolis Star-Tribune, Jan. 4, 1996]

NO MORE SCHOOL CLOSINGS FOR ERICKSON AS  
HE LEAVES COHOST ROLE AT WCCO

(By Noel Holston)

Shouldn't there be an honorary school closing or something?

WCCO Radio's Roger Erickson says he has had enough of the early-to-bed, early-to-rise lifestyle that's been his for almost 35 years. He plans to give up his cohost role on 'CCO's "Good Morning Show" on Feb. 1.

Erickson will continue to participate in prerecorded "Good Morning" features, such as the "Minnesota Hospital" spoofs. He'll still do personalized plugs for certain advertisers and work on Saturdays with Charlie Boone. But he's handing over the helm of the weekday show to Dave Lee, who has been part of it for the past four years.

"I'll still be around the station four or five days a week," Erickson said Wednesday. "I may even do some live stuff occasionally."

"I won't be doing school closings, my one claim to fame," he added.

Erickson said he had been talking with general manager Jim Gustafson for some time about cutting back. "Roger actually wanted to make this change sooner, but he graciously agreed to wait until now," Gustafson said.

Erickson lists his age at 47, but that's in Jack Benny years. He's actually closer to 67, and he concedes that his wife, Margaret, has been after him for years to make some adjustments that would allow him to stay up a little later than his usual 7:30 or 8 p.m.

Erickson said he has never seen "ER," let alone "Late Show with David Letterman."

"I hear there are people who eat dinner as late as 6 o'clock," he said. "Is that true?"

"You really don't have a life at night," he continued, more seriously. "I know I'm not the only one. I know there are a whole lot of people doing a variety of jobs who have those kind of hours, so I'm not going to sit here and complain. I've had just a great run. I've loved doing that morning show."

Erickson, born and raised in Winthrop, Minn., studied theater at the University of Minnesota.

He gushes about the great early training he got doing radio drama for campus station KUOM-AM.

Erickson left a Stillwater radio station in 1959 to take his first job in Minneapolis, which wasn't as one would guess, at the Good Neighbor of the North—or even on radio.

"I auditioned at WCCO about 2,000 times," Erickson recalled. "I knew it was where I wanted to be, but I'm sure that, like most radio stations, they listened to the tape and then they put it aside. So I never got a call. And then the Bozo opportunity came up."

The Bozo opportunity?

Erickson said the original Bozo the Clown, Chicago broadcaster Larry Harmon, syndicated his show's format to TV stations around the country, which had only to hire a live clown to talk to kids and introduce the provided cartoons.

"I thought, 'This is the opportunity I'm looking for. I'm going to go into [radio] through the back door. I'm going to go in through television.'"

Erickson auditioned to be Bozo at WCCO-TV, Channel 4, and got the job. Two months later, the radio station offered him a job as well.

After a couple of years of night work, WCCO teamed Erickson with Maynard Speece ("a great storyteller who regularly challenged the parameters of Minnesota taste") on the 5 to 7 a.m. shift and with Charlie Boone in the afternoons.

"I would run over [to Channel 4] between 7 and 9 and put on the [Bozo] makeup and the costume and do some live spots for maybe Hostess Twinkies, take the makeup off, run back," Erickson said. "Charlie and I would start working on our afternoon show, work up to 1 o'clock, go on the air 1 to 3. About 3:30, I go back over to television, prepare the Bozo show, which went from 4:30 to 5. And at least once or twice a week, I'd visit a store as Bozo the Clown, with about a thousand kids lined up. And I wouldn't have had it any other way. It was fantastic."

Boone and Erickson eventually became the morning team, and their weekday partner-

ship lasted until 1992, when Boone cut back his hours. They reigned supreme in the mornings for almost three decades, challenged only by the Knapp and Donuts team on KSTP-FM in the '80s and finally edged out in, the '90s by Tom Barnard's morning crew on KORS-FM. The "Good Morning Show" remains one of WCCO's strengths.

Erickson dropped out of Monday mornings last fall, a move designed to lighten his workload and give heir apparent Lee an opportunity to flex some different muscles.

"I feel very comfortable leaving now," Erickson said. "It's in good hands."

## ENDING COLA INEQUITY

HON. SAM FARR

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 24, 1996

Mr. FARR. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to discuss an issue of great importance to our Nation's military retirees: COLA equity.

The thousands of veterans and military retirees in my district have repeatedly asked that the inequity in COLA's for military and Federal civilians be ended—most recently during a veterans' town hall meeting I held last week.

This House has been unprecedented in dedicating itself toward ending the problem of inequity in military cost of living adjustments for military retirees. Early last year, legislation was introduced by my colleague, Mr. JIM MORAN, to end COLA inequity. The House also included a provision ending the disparity in COLA's in the budget reconciliation bill—a provision which, unfortunately, was removed by the Senate. In response, my Republican colleague, Mr. BILL YOUNG, introduced a new, fast-track bill to accomplish the same task. I am proud to have cosponsored both Mr. YOUNG's and Mr. MORAN's bills, and I applaud the tenacity with which the House leadership has pursued this important matter.

A provision to end the COLA inequity problem was included in the conference report of the Department of Defense authorization bill, which the House approved today. While I strongly supported the provision, I could not support the entire bill, a bill which mandated a \$7 million increase in defense spending over the President's original budget.

This spending increase comes at a time when other Federal programs—especially programs serving veterans—are suffering from serious budget cuts. For example, last year's Veterans Affairs budget, which provides for medical care for millions of veterans and military retirees and the construction and improvement of VA medical facilities, was cut by nearly \$1 billion from 1994. At the very least, we cannot speak about mutual sacrifice in ending the deficit at the same time that we actually increase spending in defense.

I will continue to support the House's legislative efforts to remove the COLA inequity once and for all. Our Nation's military retirees deserve no less.

## OUR 2 CENTS' WORTH

HON. JOHN CONYERS, JR.

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, January 24, 1996

Mr. CONYERS. Mr. Speaker, yesterday marked the first day workplace and civil rights